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## **Birkholz welcomes governor's assistance on state's water protection plan**

**Lansing** – Sen. Patty Birkholz (R-Saugatuck Twp) today welcomed the governor's announcement of a six-point water protection plan that will assist in carrying out several key provisions of the 66 recommendations made by the Great Lakes Conservation Task Force in 2002.

"I am appreciative of the governor's support in protecting one of Michigan's greatest natural resources," Birkholz said. "Working together in a bipartisan fashion shows the commitment and dedication we all have for conserving and protecting our Great Lakes and inland waterways.

"I am also pleased to learn that the governor fully intends to use the Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council we created to help shape a new regulatory program."

Several critical water issues have been targeted by both the Senate and the House for early decisive action to establish the framework for groundwater withdrawals through work on the Great Lakes Conservation Task Force. In addition, other key legislation was passed and signed into law recently to protect the state's waters. These include SB 289 (PA 148 of 2003) and HB 4087 (PA 177 of 2003) to protect our groundwater and SB 226-229 (PA 269-272 of 2003) to regulate the possession of aquatic nuisance species. The legislature also has sent strong messages to Congress both to fully fund Michigan's share of federal funding for Great Lakes work and to repeal existing loopholes for ballast water control in the nation's Clean Water Act.

"I applaud the work of my Republican colleagues and the governor on their work to establish water protection policies using key recommendations of the Great Lakes Conservation Task Force," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming). "It is an important commitment to fully protect the Great Lakes and our state's inland waterways. I agree with the Governor that the work we do to conserve these resources will provide a lasting legacy and that we must work in a bipartisan manner to accomplish it."

(More)

Birkholz also agrees that more effort must be focused on completing the negotiations on Annex 2001. Although the Legislature has sent resolutions urging finalization of the discussions, this is an issue where the governor can have a tremendous impact.

“As a member of the Great Lakes Commission and a co-creator of the new Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, I am fighting to unify the Great Lakes states and provinces on the issue of water protection,” Birkholz said. “The work being done in these two groups should help pave the way for the Great Lakes governors to complete work on Annex 2001.”

In addition, Birkholz reiterated her support for the legislation funding a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. This legislation, SB 252, has already passed the Senate and awaits conference committee action.

On other issues mentioned by the governor, such as the regulation of sewer overflows, Birkholz said she is awaiting the bill draft of legislation that will provide necessary assistance and direction to local communities to control overflows from septic systems. She also supports the call for wetland protection on state lands and says it makes sense that the governor should ensure that her own agencies do not contribute to further erosion of our wetlands.

“From all perspectives, I see the governor’s announcement as a strong sign of bipartisan cooperation and partnership that all Michigan citizens believe we must take,” Birkholz said. “I look forward to hearing the details of this plan so we can commit and continue our support to protect our waters.”

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